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## **Does Interpersonal Communication Carry Its Own Reward In Civil Society?**

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*“If marketization is changing the nature of NPOs and the volunteer work that takes place in them, then what happens to the **relationships** between people in the organisations? “*

## 1. RATIONALE & BACKGROUND

The conditions non-profit organisations (NPOs) exist under are changing. According to Eikenberry & Kluver (2004) market values increasingly influence NPOs, and this can be seen as a threat to their contribution to building and maintaining a strong civil society.

Building social capital is one way NPOs may contribute to civil society. Social capital is also important for the existence of the NPOs, because building strong local networks of trust (i.e. good relations between people) is traditionally needed to mobilize collective action amongst volunteers.

My aim is to take a closer look at these relations between people, through a study of their interpersonal communication and the context it takes place in. I hypothesize that one reason people choose to work voluntarily (i.e. unpaid) in NPOs, is because this type of work offers different interpersonal communication and relations than their paid work.

If market values from the private and public sector are increasingly influencing the NPOs in the third sector, then one could argue that the differences between paid work and volunteer work are becoming smaller. In terms of social capital and interpersonal relations, one could ask: If non-profits traditionally have built stronger social bonds than for-profits, but this is changing, what is then left for the non-profits to keep their volunteers engaged? Although over-simplifying the differences between for-profit and non-profit sector, this hypothesis forms the background of my project.

## 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study's overall purpose is to develop distinctly communicative explanations for non-profit phenomena like social capital, and to understand the role different types of organisations play as context for this communication.

This focus is inspired by Koschmann (2012), who argues that communicative explanations, which can “complement, challenge, and extend existing theoretical frameworks” (Koschmann, 2012, p. 139) are missing in non-profit research. Social capital specifically, is according to Lewis (2005) a central example of such a non-profit phenomenon, and I argue that an important understanding of social capital can be found through micro level analysis of interpersonal communication. When social capital e.g. is described as “bonds of trust and reciprocity” (Salamon 1997, para. 13 in Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004, p. 137) a micro level analysis of interpersonal communication between volunteers can show in what way the volunteers in organisations show trust and reciprocity.

Combined with analysis of the organisational context and with interviewing volunteers, the study seeks to explain which specific context this communication takes place in, and importantly how this communication and this context is experienced by the volunteers.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study is planned to be a case study (Maaløe, 1996) where a small group of people will be followed in both their paid and volunteer work.

Field notes, photos and video recording will be used to document the field work, and micro level analysis of the interpersonal communication will be conducted with among others Conversation Analysis (Femø Nielsen & Beck Nielsen, 2005) and theories on Facework (Goffman, 1955).

The micro level analysis of the communication will be combined with interviews (Alvesson, 2003; Kvale, 2007) where a) the volunteers own understanding of their choice to volunteer, b) their understanding of the organisations they are part of and c) their understanding of their communication with other volunteers will be explored.

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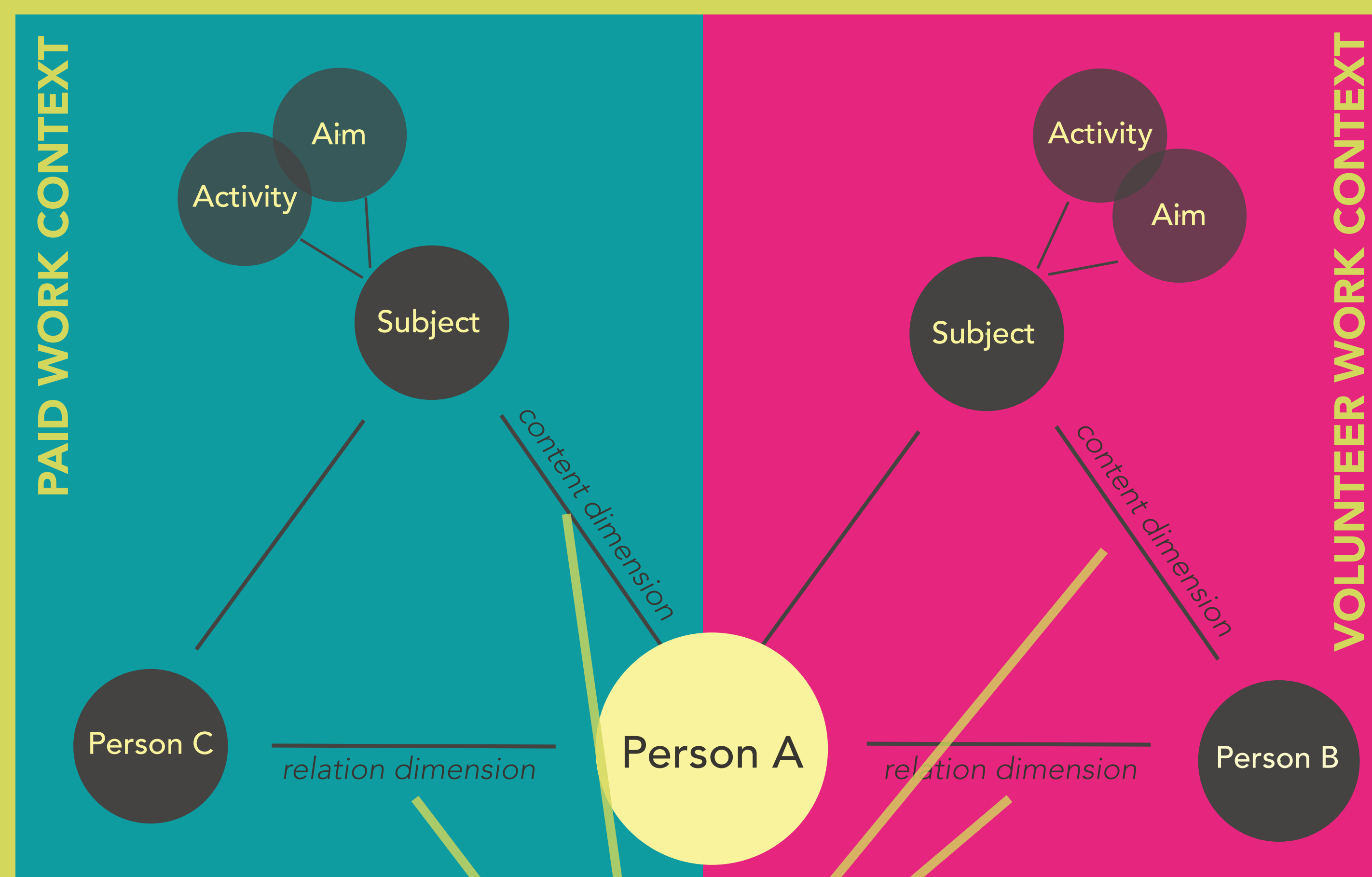
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## 4. INTENDED FINDINGS

I will be following the same person in their paid and volunteer work respectively, and will be conducting micro level analysis of interactions taking place in the two contexts, along with analysis of the two contexts. My understanding of the interaction will look at both a content dimension (what are they talking about) and a relation dimension (what is the relationship between the people talking). Importantly I will also interview the person about their own understanding of the interaction and the context, and I will discuss the results from my analysis with the person.

I aim to find:

- 1) Distinctly communicative understandings and explanations of a group of peoples volunteer work.
- 2) Differences between paid and volunteer work that make a difference. In a time where the lines between paid work and volunteer work are becoming blurry, I aim to contribute with an insight into aspects, which are important to keep separate.



DOES INTERPERSONAL  
COMMUNICATION  
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